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BOOKS, READ THEM AND KEEP THEM.

BY- COLLINS, ROBERT H.

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AS PART OF THE "ROOMS OF 20" PROJECT IN THE ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, PUBLIC SCHOOLS, A BOOK-OWNERSHIP PROGRAM HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO MOTIVATE DISADVANTAGED PUPILS TO READ AND LEARN. CHILDREN IN THIS PROGRAM ARE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO "EARN" BOOKS BY SHOWING THE TEACHER THAT THEY OWN A PUBLIC LIBRARY CARD OR BY HAVING READ TWO BOOKS FROM THE PUBLIC OR CLASSROOM LIBRARY. THE PROGRAM, FINANCED UNDER TITLE I OF THE 1965 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT, HAS BEEN CONDUCTED IN 76 REGULAR CLASSES AND IN A NUMBER OF SATURDAY AND SUMMER SCHOOL CLASSES. HOWEVER A PROBLEM IS ANTICIPATED IN ACQUIRING FUNDS TO CONTINUE THE PROGRAM BEYOND THE FIRST SEMESTER OF THE 1967 SCHOOL YEAR. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 3, NUMBER 5, DECEMBER 1967. (LB)

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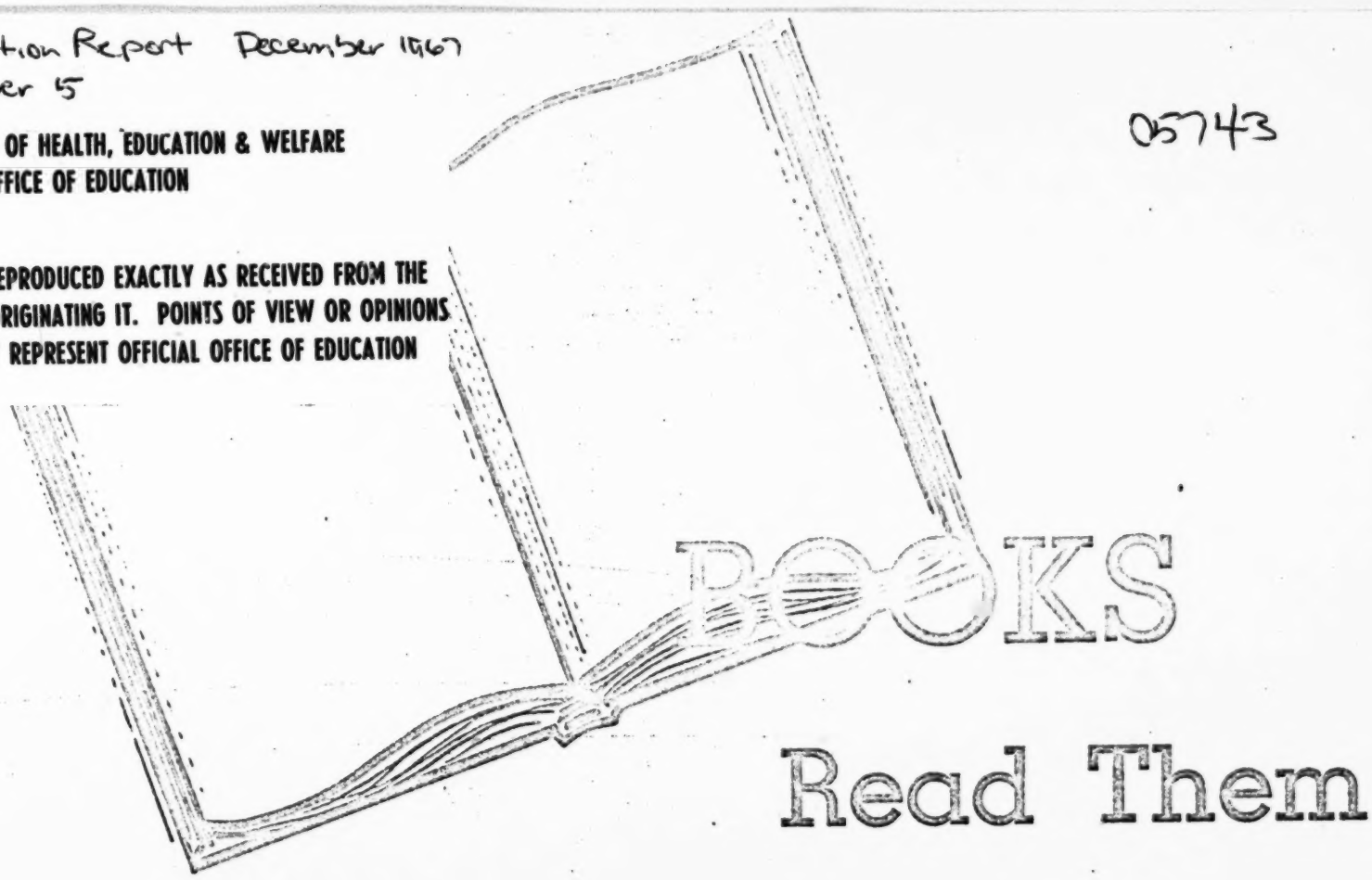

Read Them

By Robert H. Collins

SUPT. WILLIAM KOTTMEYER and several other educators of the St. Louis public-school system were discussing the problems of motivating disadvantaged students one day about a year ago.

"Those of us accustomed to having free access to books sometimes have a little difficulty in appreciating the fact that literally thousands of our children have never owned a book in all of their lives," Dr. Kottmeyer observed. "This business of taking pride at an early age in books and in having books of one's own cannot be emphasized too strongly, for obvious reasons."

What would happen to the children in the "Rooms of 20" program if they were given the opportunity to earn books by reading books? Dr. Kottmeyer asked. He suggested that pride in ownership of books might be an incentive to these children to read.

The "Rooms of 20" student lacks motivation to read and learn. The program is for children who possess the potential for normal progress but who for various reasons have not made the progress expected of them.

One of the most difficult tasks in elementary education is that of getting youngsters to want to learn to read, said Dr. Gerald Moeller, the system's director of federal relations. "Too many children are dragged to the fount of knowledge and then do not want to drink. This is particularly common in the poverty areas of the big cities where there is often little social payoff for scholarly attainment."

"Such children, however, will work for tangible rewards," Dr. Moeller added. "It seems probable that they would be willing to work hard to learn to read if we were to present them with the very books which they read. They could then take the books home as their own and, in effect, begin their own home libraries."

The round-table group agreed that the idea was worth trying. The superintendent assigned Ernest Jones, director of "Rooms of 20," to develop a book-ownership project for the children under his supervision. Jones got permission from the State Department of Education to use about $4,000 earmarked for library books under Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act—enough to finance the project for about a year.

Jones and his associates made a point of choosing bright and colorful books. One selection was a set of nine books, each containing an adaptation of a European folk tale. Books in this series are *Puss in Boots, The Magic Table, The Animal Musicians, Lucky Hans, Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Cap, Tom Thumb, The Good Elves* and *The Brave Little Tailor.*

Paperbacks, with special appeal for students in the middle grades, were chosen with the following titles: *The Adventures of George Washington, Dinosaurs and More Dinosaurs, Aesop's Fables, Arrow Book of Famous Stories, Homer Price, Encyclopedia Brown, Encyclopedia Brown Strikes Again, Ghost Town Treasures, Depend on Katie John, Katie John, Mary Jane. Snowbound in Hidden Valley, Emil and the Detec-*

Robert H. Collins, Missouri correspondent for Southern Education Reporting Service, is a general assignment reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

and Keep Them

Dr. Gerald Moeller

Ernest Jones

Mrs. Edna Ricks

tives, Project Genius, Touchdown for Tommy, Ghost Rock Mystery, Sea View Secret, Danny Dunne and the Homework Machine, Revolt on Alpha C, Mr. Pudgins, About Atoms, Let's Find Out About Heat, Weather and Air, Benjamin Franklin, Helen Keller's Teacher, Down the Mississippi, and *The Sword in the Tree.*

"We said to the children, 'You may earn a book if you do two things,'" Jones explained. "'First of all, if you present to your teacher a public library card issued to you, you may earn a book that you can call your own. Second, you may earn a book if you show evidence to your teacher that you have read two books outside the classroom. You may do this by reading two books from the public library or from the classroom library.' The children understood the offer."

Administrators and teachers patiently explained to parents how the project would work and how it would benefit their children. The school people began the project with considerable apprehension.

Would the students be bored, indifferent, perhaps mildly enthusiastic or would their interest be so slight that the project would never get off the ground? And what about the parents? Would they realize the great potential of the program? Would they fully comprehend what love of good books could mean to their children?

"We had absolutely no idea how the project would turn out," Jones said. "But it caught fire." So many pupils earned the maximum number of books—a set of nine—that the supply was nearly exhausted at the end of last summer. Additional books have been obtained for the first semester, and school officials are now seeking funds to continue the program through the second semester of this school year.

Seventy-six classes participated in the program last year. The classes which met on Saturdays during the school year and six weeks in the summer also participated.

"Most of the children had never owned a book and even fewer had the desire to read outside the classroom," Jones commented. "But now just put a book—one which they have earned, which is their own—in their hands and watch them reach out to read."

One teacher reported that the poorest reader in her class participated in the book program reluctantly at first, then with increasing interest until he is now one of the most avid readers in the class.

"One mother became so interested that she went to the public library, obtained a card and began reading books," he continued. "Some parents were so impressed with the reading efforts of their children that they would call to inquire why their child had not received a book when they thought he had read the required two books. If we had anticipated that the youngsters would be as enthusiastic as they were, we would have tried to make more books available."

Mrs. Mary O'Toole, a teacher in the "Rooms of 20" program, said she received a number of letters from parents indicating how happy they were to see their children reading on their own. One father built a bookshelf for his daughter's new library as her collection of earned books grew. Not all the parents understood the project in the beginning. One mother marched back to school with her son when he came home with a book. "Teach (sic)," she said. "My boy says this book belongs to him. Is that right? Assured that it was and told how the project worked, the mother beamed with pride over her son's accomplishment.

Jones is now assistant principal of Vashon High School, and the book-ownership project has been turned over to Mrs. Edna T. Ricks, the new director of "Rooms of 20." She was one of the key figures in making the books project a success.

"Only when a child goes and picks up a book of his own is he on the road to becoming a reader," Mrs. Ricks said. "As a result of this project, books are occupying places of honors on shelves in homes that never before knew books."

Mrs. Ricks said there are sufficient funds to continue the project for the first semester of the current school year. Money still is a problem, but the educators who put this program together say it is far too worthwhile to be permitted to expire. Somehow, they say, they will get the money to continue it and expand it to other groups in the school system. ○